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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

AUGUST 1st, 1851.

## CATHEDRAL MUSIC AND COMPOSERS.

No. XIV.

Contributed by E. HOLMES, Author of the "Life of Mozart."

[The continuation of this paper should rather be "Recollections of Wesley and his times." The subject diverges from our principal theme, but it is an interesting one, and we are led into it naturally.]

It is a great mistake to suppose that Wesley's genius was confined to extempore fugue, to the regular treatment of a subject with proper answers and through a series of natural modulations to a full close. He extemporised the most wonderful and beautiful melodies, and they were harmonized and varied with consummate taste and elegance. His designs made off-hand were extremely natural and clear—they had the beginning, the middle, and the end of genuine works of art. He was so various, too, that in his best humour he was able to improvise several times in the same evening in a totally different style. In fact, at one period, the torrent of his invention was such that he could not exhaust it, even if he sat at the pianoforte from the evening deep into the night, constantly beginning new things. If after a cheerful party, when the company had all departed, the host chose to retain Wesley, and seat himself quietly by him at the pianoforte—it was then, with this one appreciating single friend, and in the silence of the night, that he seemed in the happiest mood, and gave the reign to his boundless fancy and invention. It seemed necessary to the full development of his extraordinary power of improvisation, that he should be listened to and appreciated. Sympathy was the animating influence which made even a Mozart or Beethoven surpass themselves on the like occasions.

From what I have heard of Wesley's extempore playing, through the late excellent librarian of the Madrigal society, from Mr. V. Novello, and the late Mr. Stokes, who had been his pupil—comparing what they have told me with my own experience—I feel convinced, that at the zenith of his powers he surpassed, in fire and originality, as well as in profound fugal skill, any German who has been admired in this faculty, during the present century, in England. When I first saw him he was approaching "the sere and yellow leaf" of life—his hair was already quite silvered; yet I heard him, when invited to play at the close of many an excellent musical evening, put such a climax to it, that every thing which had before been heard was entirely swallowed up and lost in

the last impression. He concentrated himself and warmed over his work with unequalled enthusiasm, and showed not only the constructive head but the most impassioned feeling. When he left off there was a general explosion of long suppressed delight from his hearers. In the midst of the impetuosity which strongly characterized his performance, he was so collected, that if by chance he struck a note which he did not intend, he could turn it into a feature, and introduce it with regularity and symmetry as a part of his composition. It was after listening to Wesley, and with reference to him, that an excellent musician observed, "Well—of all music—the extempore kind, *when it is good*, is certainly the best." In its effect on the hearer it is extremely powerful, commingling wonder and pleasure. We are held in suspense and admiration at the mysterious source of our enjoyment, and in considering the endless varieties of combination which the human faculties present.

Wesley possessed his extraordinary gifts with much modesty; and though he knew his own position, and exacted a due respect for it, his character was totally free from vanity, assumption, or display. He was not in the best spirits or humour with his art at the time when I knew him, which was near the last period at which he conducted the Covent Garden oratorios; but a little management restored his genial disposition, and made him forget his cares. He was then easily reconciled to music, and in playing generally exemplified the fine thought of Gray—

Still in our ashes live our wonted fires.

Mr. V. Novello, one evening, at his house in Percy-street, Bedford-square, selected for him, with admirable judgment and tact, the subject of the chorus in the *Messiah*, "He trusted in God." The dramatic and impassioned style of that chorus exactly suited Wesley, who, I remember, used to revel with peculiar delight on a certain point of the fugue towards the end, where the trebles enter with the subject on the high G. On this occasion we were full of curiosity to know what Wesley would do, and how he would disunite from Handel. For a few bars he kept close to the original, but he soon cleared himself of it, and sailed away into the heaven of his own invention, like the aeronauts who amuse us at present, on most fine evenings, with their ballooning exploits. By introducing new and florid counterpoints, he threw Handel's subject into an entirely new form—that of a most elaborate, interesting, and artificially-constructed instrumental fugue. No test applied to genius ever resulted in a more complete illustration of its power.

The melodies or airs which he extemporised were extremely beautiful and original. In the trio for the pianoforte and two flutes, which was

one of the latest of Wesley's productions,—and a very masterly work it is—there exists a beautiful air with variations, with parts constructed like an organ trio, which may still convey an excellent idea of the character of the things of this kind which he was accustomed to improvise. At his friend Major's, in King-street, Holborn, he one morning played a beautiful air, which he followed with such exquisite variations, as made every one who heard, regret that he did not rather pursue the modern style of Mozart rather than the older school of Bach, to which he seemed, on most occasions, to have entirely devoted himself.

If it were possible to recall the performances of Wesley, over which silence and oblivion now brood, we should find them extremely various, and that his capacious mind embraced a vast store of different forms and designs in composition. No one ever found him a mannerist, or accused him of repeating himself. The current of his musical thoughts was uncommon and original, and he seldom allowed himself to be anticipated by the hearer, unless, perhaps, in a sequence.

My opportunities of hearing Wesley on the organ were not frequent, but one musical holiday, to which Mr. Novello introduced me, is still fresh in my memory. Our day of music was to begin at noon, in the German church at the Savoy, where there is an old-fashioned beautiful organ by Snetzler. Of all the London organs this was one of the most favorite instruments of Wesley; and he seems to have looked forward to this day in high good humour, for in his invitation to his friend Novello, he begged him not to "stuff his pockets *too full* of the works of Rossini." After music in the morning, the two genial organists did not intend, for that day, to descend again to the commonplaces of life, but were to repair to Hampstead, to the house of a friend, to dine and have more music. The party in the church was only four, and the music, which consisted entirely of Bach's fugues, was played in the easy and effective form of duets. Wesley kept almost entirely his seat at the Bass, and played with every one in turn, giving to each, as he came, the choice of his own fugue. When all was over, Wesley had to play extempore—and he treated the organ in a manner, which, to a young man who had never heard any of Bach's trios, appeared extraordinarily new and difficult. He began with a soft air, and then with his right-hand on the swell, his left on the diapasons of the great organ, and his feet sliding over the pedals, he made it the subject of a trio, of which the parts for the two hands continually crossing or involved together, produced a very beautiful effect. A more difficult mode of improvisation cannot be imagined; it discovered the most profound head and the most refined taste.

Apropos of those old musical holidays, I cannot forget how Mr. Novello, a man of high enthusiasm and taste in his art, used to encourage them as soon as he got free from the toils of teaching. The old collegiate church of St. Katherine's, by the Tower, was one of our favorite haunts. The organ, by Green, of Isleworth, possessed diapasons of the most silvery tone, and the ample interior of the magnificent old church gave them just sufficient vibration—not too much. Our pleasure in that beautiful organ, with its magnificent unequalled swell, was so great, that even the snow and the "icy fang" of winter were unable to keep us from our musical devotions at St. Katherine's, where we had the great church to ourselves. Buttoned up, and lugging a great music book, we used to leave the merchants and bill brokers on 'Change to their accounts with great satisfaction, and pursue our other-world business. We did not consult the 'Price current' for the rate of bellows-blowing, and had no fear that our transactions in wind would affect the state of the market. We just stopped in the city a little while merely to pity the poor men who were there so idling their precious time, and who did not understand fugues.

It is the fatality of the organ that it wants some one to blow as well as to play it. When there was no one to blow, a sensation of faintness, as at a sudden calamity, used to oppress us: our musical expedition from the far west seemed in jeopardy, and rather than lose it, we would rush upon the first embodied stranger to whose "bulk and big assemblance of a man" half-a-crown appeared desirable, and install him in an office in which he might at once have healthful exercise, make his money, and hear a good deal of fine music for nothing.

The venerable air of this old collegiate church, with its lofty gothic aisles and antique monuments, was much enhanced by contrast with the low, poor, and dissolute neighbourhood in which it stood. You emerged from the purlieus of a sort of Wapping, abounding in ale-houses, and full of sailors and their loose-haired draggle-tailed appendages, into a silent and vast gothic edifice, breathing the air of religion, and consecrated to historic memories. I cannot undertake to say how old some of the tombs were; but stately canopied and coroneted remains associated with our highest English chivalry were there—and kneeling figures in sculpture seemed to pray in silence, and in listening attitudes, to the tones of the organ. In the neighbouring cloister many dames of high degree assumed the habit of the nuns, and dying, thought to repose for ever within the hallowed precincts of St. Katherine's. But time changes every thing. The revels of sailors long scandalized the Saint; and now, in retribution, a deluge sweeps over the whole scene—the

Continued from Page 234.

wave of St. Katherine's Dock rolls over Abbot and Abbess—mitre and crozier. In retracing the old aisles, we should now meet the strangest fish, and have above our head a roof of floating argosies freighted with outlandish wares and "men of Ind." Charles Lamb has somewhere eloquently lamented the destruction of this beautiful old church.

Concerning the pleasure which the organist takes in a fine organ, I am here reminded of a humorous and pleasant saying of the late Mr. Attwood. Speaking of the dignitaries of St. Paul's cathedral, he observed:—"It is very well that they agree to pay me for playing—for if they did not, I should be happy to pay them for letting me play." Of the like unworldly men, devoted to abstract beauty and imbued with antiquarian sentiment, our St. Katherine's associates consisted; nor did we, as true musicians, omit due attention to the creature comforts at a time-honored old hostelry.

To return to the Wesley who lived before my time. Mr. Novello told me that his grandest style of performance on the organ was when he played on a long-noted Gregorian subject, and mixed a florid one with it. His ability in this kind of double fuguing surpassed all belief. A madrigalian friend informed me that he met Wesley at a party in Islington, at which Salomon, the violin player, Clementi, and a number of the first musicians were present; that they almost pelted Wesley with the most elaborate and difficult fugue themes they could invent; all of which he played off and treated without hesitation. Salomon, who came out of the same school as Beethoven, at Bonn, could hardly contain himself in his astonishment. With this famous violinist Wesley often used to play Haydn's quartets; and Salomon, in return, was a devout listener to the works of Bach on the organ. Salomon had a lively fancy in music, and said, one day, of the bass in the last variation on the St. Ann's fugue, that "it wanted *artillery*."

In reading music Wesley was extremely quick; his eye seemed in a manner to devour a score, and he hummed to himself as he turned over the leaves. His sight-playing was, in his younger days, extraordinary. At a house where he and J. B. Cramer mutually visited, the latter produced a new MS. pianoforte duet, which he expected some friend to play with him. The friend did not come, Wesley took his place, and not only played his part admirably, but entered into the spirit of the composition in such a manner that when two pages happened to be turned over at once and Cramer kept on, he put in something so extremely good of his own, that not a note was missed. It was very agreeable to see the first impressions of his pleasure at some fine com-

position just introduced to him, and to hear his remarks.\*

Wesley was very kind and liberal in estimating the talent of others. He used to say of Reeve, the Sadler's Wells composer, that he did not know how to put a bass to his own melodies. He himself helped to bring the pathetic air, "Will Putty," into notice, by composing and publishing an excellent pianoforte piece upon it. It was his humour to invest several of Grimaldi's popular songs, and other common tunes, with all the dignity of fine music. This combination raised the oddest associations; and in playing these pieces, one was every now and then seized with a burst of laughter.

The musical pleasantry of Wesley in his vocal music, was mostly shown in uniting the grand fugal style with ludicrous words. When Mr. Immyns was appointed organist to the Foundling Hospital, Wesley, who had been a candidate, consoled himself for his disappointment by writing an ode, which he set to music. We remember the lines:—

Let Handel and Worgan  
Go thresh at the organ.

The composition was full of fugues, and showed the learned art of the organist employed for a laugh.

But his serious feeling was profound. His hymns and little sacred pieces have a pathetic character like Battishill's. And in the numerous motets, antiphons, double choruses, &c., which he has left in MS., we may see a head turned towards the highest designs in ecclesiastical music. He harmonized with a gusto and passion which I have

\* An amateur, at whose house Wesley was a frequent visitor, used to place before him quartets of Beethoven and Mozart in the form of pianoforte arrangements for four hands, and generally selected things unknown to his guest, in order to enjoy the vivacity of his first impressions, and afterwards to have the advantage of his remarks. He had the pleasure of introducing to Wesley Mozart's violin quartet in G, in one of Stegmann's four-hand arrangements, and has often told me of his lively exclamation of delight on hearing the dispersion of the chord of the second, which appears in the third bar of the annexed passage:—



In a hundred such examples strongly associated with Wesley, his fine taste and enthusiasm was diffused among his musical companions, to the great improvement and advantage of the young.

never heard equalled. He told me that one of the greatest treats he had ever had in music, was in accompanying the Gregorian requiem on the organ at a catholic chapel. It was sung in *canto fermo* by about fifty priests, and he supplied the harmonies extempore.

Wesley once showed me on what sort of subject and in what style Handel used to play when suddenly called upon, and having nothing particular in his head. Whether Kelway or Worgan had told him I know not. He was extremely interested in all that concerned his art, and obliging in communicating his experience.

Instrumental as well as vocal music seems to have occupied his thoughts. He wrote a trio for three pianofortes, which was performed by himself, Stokes, and Novello, at the Hanover-square Rooms. It is the last thing of the kind that has been heard since the times of Sebastian Bach and Mozart. There exists also a beautiful pianoforte duet by Wesley, which will perhaps now never see the light.

It is rather to be regretted that Wesley so entirely devoted himself to the works of Sebastian Bach, and that he suffered himself to remain, throughout life, in the trammels of the past. All the elements of progress were contained in his fiery genius—but in England his powers wanted free scope and play. Had he lived in Germany, we should probably have had symphonies and quartets from him; the active invention, the melodious turn, and the elegance of his musical mind, fully entitled him to a place as the worthy companion and disciple of Mozart and Beethoven.

Conclusion.

#### SACRED HARMONIC SOCIETY.

One of the events of the musical season has been the welcome return of Mdme. Clara Novello. This gifted vocalist, in whom the famed Malibran took such an interest, was for some years in the first rank of native vocalists, especially as an eloquent exponent of sacred music. On her marriage with Count Gigliucci, of Rome, she retired from her professional career, but returned last year to the lyric stage, in Italy, with signal success. Her last engagement was at Lisbon, where she enacted *Semiramide*, for many nights in succession, and was rapturously received by the Portuguese audiences. Mdme. Clara Novello arrived in London from Lisbon on the 13th instant, and on the 18th appeared at Exeter Hall, singing the soprano part in Handel's *Messiah*. On her entrance into the orchestra, she was cordially greeted by the immense auditory, and by her comrades in the orchestra, the patriarch Lindley affectionately receiving the daughter of his old friend, Vincent Novello. In the recitatives descriptive of the Angel's appearance, the fine declamatory style and powerful voice of Mdme. Clara Novello told most effectively; in the exuberant jubilation of the "Rejoice greatly," her vocal display proved her capabilities for the florid school; her cadenza at the close, with the ascent to the high D, was brilliantly executed. \* \* \* \* Notwithstanding

the regulations against applause, the amateurs were so delighted with the fresh and brilliant voice of Mdme. Clara Novello, that the applause followed many of her pieces with vehemency. A more superb organ than that of Mdme. Clara Novello does not now exist; her intonation is unexceptionable, and her style has acquired Italian polish, finish, and sentiment, by her residence in the sunny south. Miss Dolby, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Herr Formès were the other vocalists.

Last night, Mdme. Clara Novello was to sing the soprano part in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, a notice of which performance will appear in our next week's impression.

Such has been the financial success of the present unusually protracted season, that the committee have made arrangements for the members of the society, including the amateurs and professors engaged in the orchestra, to enjoy a day's festival at Rosherville Gardens, near Gravesend, next Wednesday, the expenses being defrayed out of the profits of the two performances, under Costa's direction, of the *Messiah* and *Elijah*, on the 18th and 25th inst.—*From the Illustrated London News, July 26th, 1851.*

#### Correspondence.

To the Editor of the "Musical Times."

SIR,—Whilst paying the just tribute to Mr. S. Wesley for the introduction of Bach's Organ Fugues in England (ante page 192), it should not be forgotten that the late Mr. A. F. C. Kollmann, of the German chapel, St. James's, so early as 1799 directed attention to Bach's Fugues. In his "Essay on Musical Composition," Mr. Kollmann not only expressed his high admiration of Bach's Organ Works, but selected from them several pieces, which he inserted as examples of his style. He made particular mention of his "Well Tempered Clavier," since known as the "Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues;" and, as they existed only in manuscript, he announced his intention of publishing an analyzed edition of them, at the same time giving one of them, that in C Major, as a specimen. This announcement was immediately noticed in the *Allgemeine Mus. Zeitung of Leipzig*, for Oct. 1799, in the following words:—"England is not unacquainted with the state of music in Germany: even those higher departments of German art, in which we ourselves begin to be strangers, are so well known there, that an English organist can have the courage of publishing Sebastian Bach's 'Well Tempered Clavier,' with explanations; when but a few years ago, an attempt to print that work was made in vain, at two different places in that great composer's own country."

These remarks appear to have created so great an emulation, that this work, which had never before been printed, was shortly afterwards published at three different places, at Zurich, Bonn, and Leipzig: and so many copies of these three first editions were imported into England, that Mr. Kollmann was induced to relinquish his intention of publishing the work.

It was not till twelve years after the above period, viz. the year 1811, that Mr. Wesley, in connexion with Mr. Horn, brought out his edition; and though all who reverence the "mighty master" will cheerfully admit how much we owe to Mr. Wesley for his zealous endeavours to display the beauties of Bach's works to advantage, by his able performance of them, yet, we should render to all their due, and we can hardly be considered to act justly towards Mr. Kollmann, if the above facts are altogether lost sight of.

I am, Sir, with great respect, your obedient servant,  
Walworth. J. Y.